

13 May 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

There has always been a traditional reluctance in the U.S. Armed Forces to talk about the need of motivation for soldiers, sailors and airmen. Today the whole thrust of the assault against us is to undermine Americans' belief in their country, the justice of its cause and the need to fight to defend them.

Those who would destroy America never cease in their efforts to convince the young of the injustices committed by the U.S. (and more particularly its Armed Forces) in the past. Because so great a part of the Armed Forces is made up of young people, we can no longer rely on the smug complacency of the past. Any society or organization which will not defend itself will not survive and in fact will not deserve to survive.

In my view a much more direct effort should be made within the Armed Forces to point out to the young service members what America's values really are, what America has meant to the human spirit and to the hopes of mankind, what the threats are to those things which give life meaning and why we should defend them.

Traditionally we have felt that this sort of thing might be necessary for Europeans but not for Americans. That may have been true in the past; it is no longer true. Obviously in such indoctrination (and I use the word advisedly) we should stay out of U.S. domestic politics.

Indoctrination is part of what makes a soldier ready to lay down his life. It is what has made the Germans, the Russians, the North Koreans and the North Vietnamese such formidable opponents in this century. We cannot neglect such indoctrination at any price. The idea that indoctrination must be necessarily totalitarian is false -- any more than teaching a doctor medicine is totalitarian. In the comfortable life of our time young soldiers subject to discipline, restrictions and hardships, often for which nothing in civilian life has prepared them, must understand why this must be.

Pride of belonging, pride of being a part, pride of all their past, and hopes for the future are essential if any army is to fight. There should be no apologies for the uniform or the need to fight. It is these which made America free and great and it is these which will guarantee that America has a future and with America human freedom and dignity.

There must be cultivated a sense of belonging to something great and historical, to which not everyone can belong. There must be no taking of America for granted and being unwilling to talk about it. There must be discipline and pride. Without these there is only a shapeless mass of humanity. Freedom is not a right once won for always. It is permanently threatened and must be permanently defended. The Armed Forces are the shield and safeguard of everything we cherish. We must have pride, not guilt, in membership in them. We have always had a prudish reticence in our Armed Forces in peace time. We are the only great nation without military parades in our great cities. We are the only great nation whose military bands spend more time playing Mozart or rock-and-roll rather than the tunes which led our forefathers from Valley Forge to triumph over Nazi Germany and warlike Japan.

In the past we have had time to get ready for the great conflicts. We shall not have it again. We must be ready before. Knowing the dangers but knowing also what is at stake.

The American soldier can do anything, but he must be told why. Let us tell him.